



ELSAH HISTORY

Number 24

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August 1978

The Village of Elsah MUSEUM

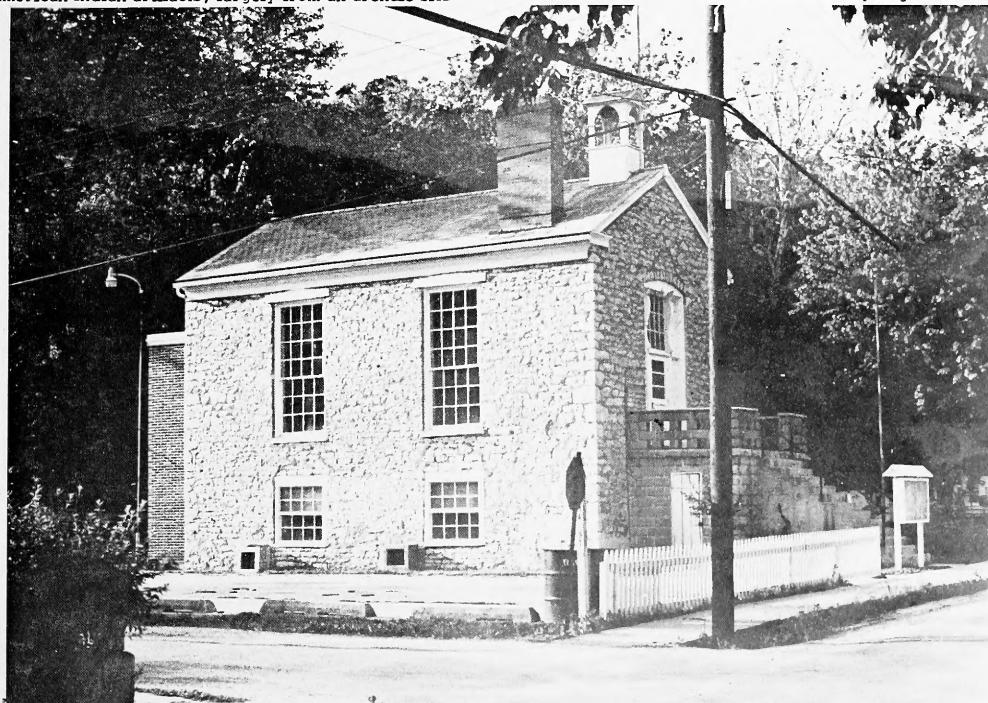
In late May the Village of Elsah Museum, after a period of quiescence, reopened. Situated in the upper room of the Village Civic Center, the museum is now freshly painted and features a number of new displays.

Among these are a small geode collection; some local American Indian artifacts, largely from an archaic site

west of the village; old photographs; a display of old tools; some local furniture; a schoolroom exhibit; and a small local fossil display.

Displays will be changed from time to time in the future, and the present projection is greatly to increase the current display of old Elsah photographs.

Instrumental in the refurbishing of the museum was the Elsah Village Board, which provided funds and guidance; the museum board, consisting of Holly Alder, Patty Sontag, Pat Farmer, Mary Ann Pitchford, and Paul Williams (who is serving as the museum director); and Vicki Crandell, a Principia College student who did a great deal of work on the museum in the spring as a



The museum is in the upper room of the Village of Elsah Civic Center on Mill Street.

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student project.

Currently the museum is open from 2 to 4 on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, though these hours may be altered when the times most likely to attract visitors are discovered. Museum attendants are being drawn from younger people of the Elsah community. The museum will also open on special occasions if groups desire to see the collection. Such arrangements can be made through the village clerk, Mrs. Blanche Darnell, or through the museum director.

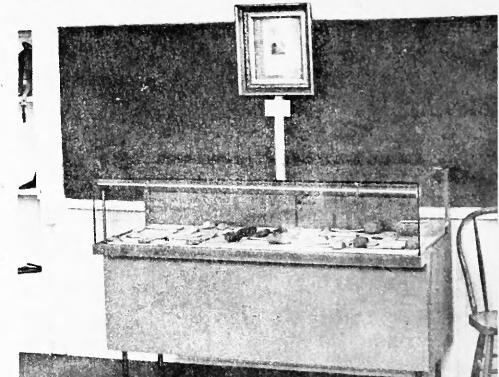
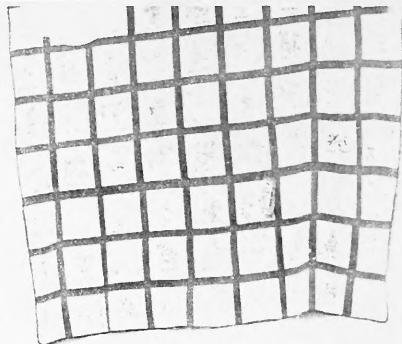
Admission to the museum is free, though donations are accepted to help improve the collection. Right now the museum is trying to enlarge its group of old Elsah-area tools and would welcome donations of such things.

The room in which the museum is housed is ideal for its purpose, being itself historic as a schoolroom for four Elsah grades for a hundred and twelve years. The tall side windows of the room flood the interior with natural light, and the attractive proportions of the room give it a friendly aura on which a number of visitors have remarked.



The schoolroom corner of the Village of Elsah Museum

HEF is grateful for the following contributions: From Mr. and Mrs. Harold E. Bunting, \$100; from Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Atkinson, \$25; from Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Stickler, \$15; from Ms. Adade Wheeler, \$6, and from Richard M. Bundy and John Swett, \$5 each.



The north wall of the museum features a friendship quilt made in Grafton in 1892, a portrait of early Elsah citizen, Christian Loehr, and a case of local Indian artifacts.



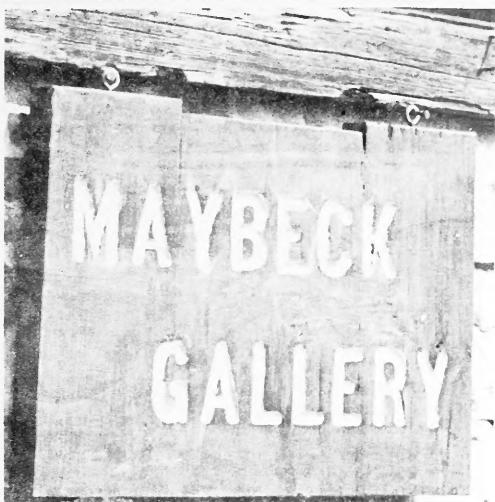
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Every spring there is a day, somewhere around the 20th of April, when the trees, which seemed comparatively bare up until then, suddenly seem in full foliage. Perhaps this seems so because of a sudden growth of oak leaves and catkins. At any rate, numbers of people remark on the fact.

There also seems to be a day in summer when one suddenly recognizes that the season has tilted over its crest and is descending toward fall. It would surely be rash to pin this down to a day, but this year one can almost say that July 24th was that day. On the 22nd, a wooly bear was observed on an Elsah road. The evening insects suddenly grew louder around then. The morning of the 24th dawned with a cool freshness that was not there through all of early July. Early in the day a line of swallows was seen together on a wire. In spite of the rain, there were some pink leaves on one burning bush.

Surely plenty of summer will follow that date, but subsequent events indicate that that indeed was a turning point.



During the early days of the building of Principia College on the bluffs east of Elsah, in 1931, the Spatz brothers of Elsah planned to open a gas station on the west side of LaSalle Street, opposite their store in the Mott Building. Architect for the college campus, Bernard Maybeck, of California, heard of their plan, and since they intended to construct a corrugated steel

building, out of harmony with the stone and frame structures around it, he offered to design a limestone structure for them and even help them build it. This he did, not only giving his expert professional advice, but laying stone on weekends. Thus Maybeck, always forward-looking, became Elsah's first creative preservationist.

After the Spatzes operated their gas station for some time, it closed and stood idle. John Wanamaker eventually purchased the structure because he wanted to preserve it, at various times renewing its roof but never putting it to any use, although at one time he had an idea of using the Maybeck structure as an entranceway to an apartment which would stand behind and above it. However, before his recent retirement, he sold it to Principia, and they sought some adaptive use for it in order to preserve it.

This use recently came when Al and Inge Mack, and their son, Eric, obtained a ten year lease on the building for use as a gallery. Thus the Macks took on their fourth large restoration project in Elsah, after their own house, the Gothic house on LaSalle Street, and the Elsah Landing Restaurant.

They drew up a plan which involved enclosing the front of the structure. The zoning commission approved it since it was obvious that the full intention was to keep the building in the spirit of Maybeck.

Their plan involved leaving the stone and masonry as much as possible as it had been, and preserving the original wood that was still sound. The Macks were happy to be able to save the Maybeck door, which had been recessed somewhat away from the weather, as well as the side win-



dows. Al Mack reconstructed the rotted dividing wall, manufacturing grooved boards to match the decayed ones as much as possible. The wall was then stained to look like the preserved Maybeck door. Proper lighting, heat, and climate control were added, and a new teak floor.

One original feature of the building was a large beam taken from the 1891 Piasa Bluffs Hotel that stood on the high ground between Elsah and Chautauqua. At the time the gas station was built, the hotel had been newly razed and the beam was available. Naturally the Macks wanted to preserve it, but one unfortunate aspect of the original Maybeck design almost prevented this. The lattice of rafters that projected beyond the roof in front had led rainwater down into the beam and promoted rot. At the time of the restoration, they found the beam decayed and termite-ridden. However, because of its historical interest, they kept it, installing a further supporting member behind it and modifying the original design to prevent further rain-caused decay.

Inge Mack opened the Maybeck Gallery early this summer with an exhibit of paintings and art work by James Schmidt, a member of the fine arts department at Principia College, and by Candy Nartonis and Blanche Darnell, both Elsah artists. Their work will continue to be displayed as that of other artists is brought in.

Currently the hours of the gallery are Thursday through Sunday, 12:30 to 4:00, though these times may be modified. The gallery is also opened for receptions and by special appointment.

A show of art work entitled "Summer Shapes Two," by Carolyn Lord, will be featured from August 4 through 24. In September a display of paintings by an internationally known Belgian artist, Sabine DeCoune, who is situated near Bastogne, will follow. After this works by James Richmond will be shown.

In addition to its art work, the Maybeck Gallery features crafts, such as glass, quilts, of which some are always on display, pottery, prints, and Indonesian shadow puppets.

When asked what her purpose in opening the gallery was, Inge Mack replied that she enjoyed sharing beautiful things with people, both those from Elsah and those who come to visit. Those who know Inge, and her talent for creating beauty from things as simple as pine cones and catalpa pods, or textures of stone, wood, or tile, recognize the gallery as a natural outflow of her talent. She also remarked that she enjoys places "edited by a certain thought," adding, "The Maybeck Gallery is definitely an edited place."

Response so far to the gallery, according to Inge, has been very enthusiastic in the way she had in mind. "People really seem to be enjoying what is on display," she said, and this was her main purpose.

Perhaps old Elsah citizens should save their ice cutting equipment. Charles Clarke, of the Stamford (Connecticut) Museum has recently given some demonstrations of traditional equipment for ice cutting for use "when we run out of oil."

Mr. Edward Keller, whose family ran the last ice business in Elsah, closing in the mid 1920's, recently donated his superlative collection of ice cutting equipment to a museum in Alton. A number of local citizens still recall cutting ice in the area, both on the river and in local ponds.

RELPH AUCTION

On Saturday, July 29, an auction was held at the home of the late Robyn Relph on Valley Street. It consisted of all the personal possessions in the house, Mr. Relph's car, and the house and lot itself. Mr. Relph left no will, nor had he any known relatives. Because of this the proceeds of the sale go to the government.

A large crowd attended the auction, bidding on everything from old paint and old saws to Mr. Relph's television repair equipment and some fine old art nouveau silver. The day was as warm as the bidding, especially in the narrow compass of the hedge-enclosed yard.

The house itself was sold to David Ives, of Elsah. The Relph house is curious in that the additions, which are several, all made by Robyn, are much larger than was the original tiny frame structure from which they sprouted at various times since the early 1930's.

As his former employer and a close friend, postmaster Paul Barnes, assisted by his wife, Alma, had the Herculean task of making all the arrangements for the disposal of the estate. Though not quite Augean enough to demand the turning aside of the nearby creek to produce its rearrangement, the property and its contents demanded much work in preparation for the auction.



Auctioneer Clyde Cope calls for bids on Robyn Relph's pipe threading dies, surrounded by interested buyers.

JULY 4th

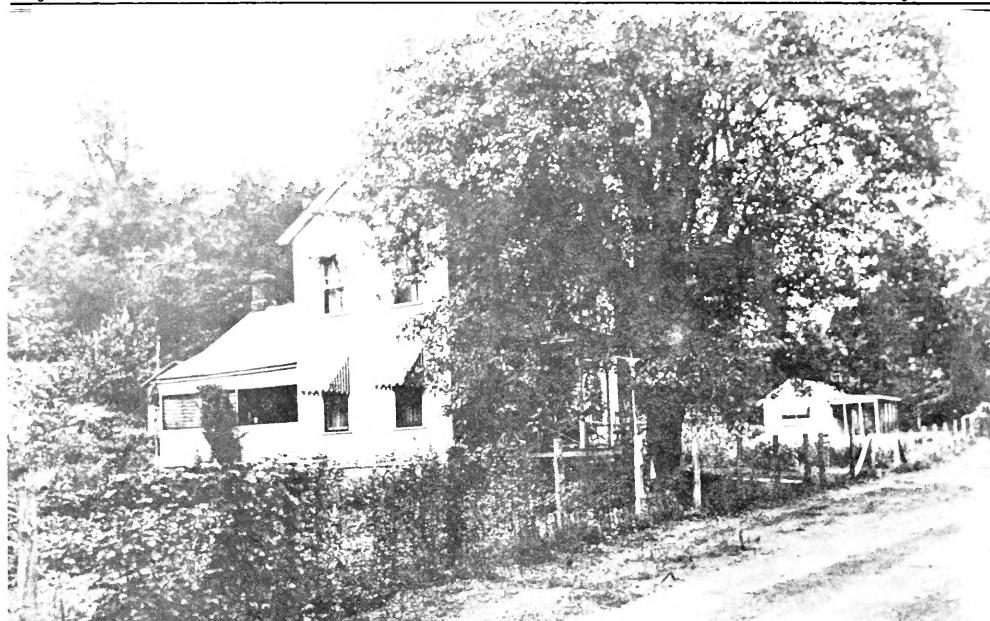
John and Nancy Garrett provided music for the 4th of July pot luck picnic in Fountain Square Park.

After the picnic in the park on the 4th, a village volleyball game was started next to the Civic Center. All who wished to play were included, making the volleys long and spirited.



July 4th picnickers had a bright and pleasantly cool day for talk and munching.





Among the effects of Robyn Relph was the upper photograph of this pair, showing Valley Street as it looked around 1930, with his house, in its original state, in the background. The lower comparison photo shows the same

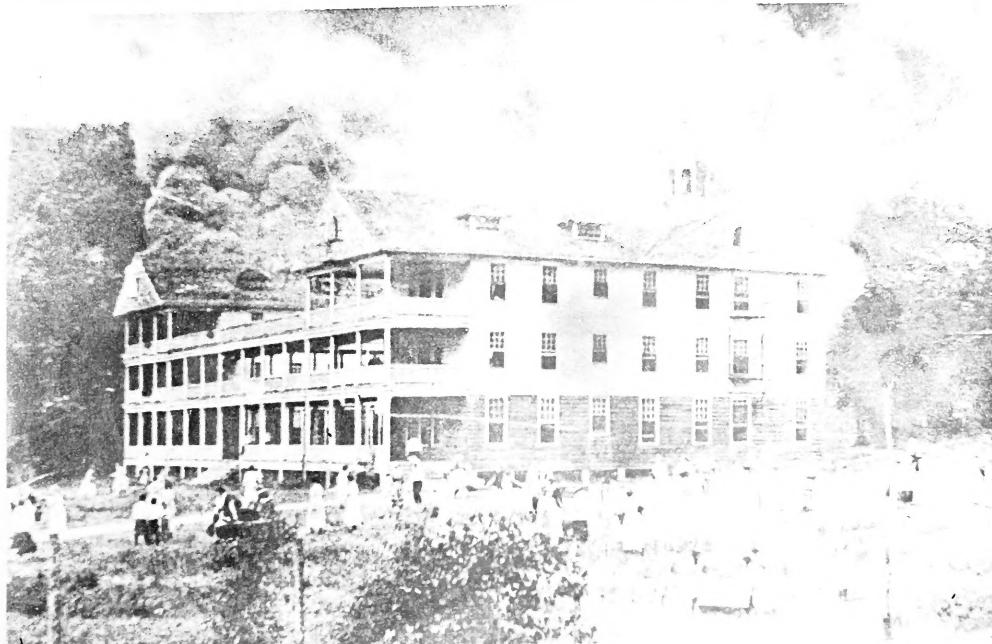
scene this summer. The great changes in the Wilck House were made by Edward Hussey, chief engineer during the building of the Principia College campus. Additions have resulted in even greater changes to the Relph House.





Two photographs of the Chautauqua Inn have recently come to HEF. The Inn in normal times comes as a photo contributed by Ray Armbruster. Built in 1903, and financed by stock sales, the Inn ran until it burned

on August 11, 1919, as shown in the photograph contributed by Lorena Rankin, taken from a postcard. For more information see William M. Fabian's CHAUTAUQUA, ILLINOIS: A BRIEF HISTORY (HEF leaflet # 5).



HOUSE TOUR

HEF's Mother's Day House tour went off this year with its usual verve and eclat. Co-directors of this year's tour were Shirley Vogt and Martie Marshall.

The houses open to the public were the Grayson House, the Pitchfords', the Wilcks', the Musselmans' (for the first time ever), and the Holts'.

In addition to these houses, Judy and Glenn Felch opened their small studio, Ailsa Craig; the Village Hall was open for the sale of crafts, art work, and HEF publications; the village calaboose was open below the hall, complete with a winsome prisoner; the Methodist and Christian Science churches were open; the Elsah Landing Restaurant ministered to the gustatorial appetites of the visitors; and the Civic Center was open for ticket and craft sales. For the first time in several years, the Village of Elsah Museum was also open on tour day.

Though this year's crowd was not so overwhelmingly big as had been the case last year, it was as large a group of visitors as could be easily managed in Elsah. The weather also cooperated, affording the visitors a coolish and sunny break in a very rainy period. Within an hour after the tour closed, so did the clouds, and it was raining again.

Ed Lewitz and his crew of parking volunteers did an excellent job, as usual, of sorting out the cars. A large number of volunteers, including a number of students from Principia College, especially Howard House, helped out to make the tour a success. HEF wishes to thank those who so generously opened their houses, and all who gave of their time to put the house tour together and make it run smoothly. It is truly a community event and a fine chance to give our visitors a taste of Elsah hospitality and village charm.

HOUSE TOUR PUBLICITY:

On the day before the house tour, May 13, 1978, the ALTON TELEGRAPH ran an article on the tour with several photographs (p. B-4). The JERSEYVILLE DEMOCRAT-NEWS for May 15, 1978 included three photographs from the tour, including one of Debbie White sketching a soulful Holly Alder, while supervised by the Alders' dog, Power; a spinning exhibition in the Village Hall; and the line waiting to get into the Elsah Landing Restaurant.

A PIGGOTT GENEALOGY:

Helynn M. Carrier, of 601 South Baywood Avenue, San Jose, CA 95128, has produced an extensive genealogical compilation she has entitled PRELIMINARY PIGGOTT PACKET, Compiled and Prepared for Further Research and Study.

It consists of a great deal of information concerning the descendants of Captain James Piggott, whose two sons, Isaac Newton and Joseph, were the first settlers of Eminence, now a part of the Principia College campus, in Elsah Township, in 1828. As EH # 20 points out, the Piggott family continued to play a prominent part in the history of the village.

METHODIST CHURCH RUMMAGE SALE:

As has been the custom, the Elsah Methodist Church held its July rummage sale in the old Village Hall. Church members Helen Crafton, Pat Farmer, and others did their usual heroic job of preparing vast quantities of clothing for the sale, filling the hall with donations.

In a note to HEF, which donated the use of the hall, Pat Farmer wrote as follows: "Perhaps you would like to know we made \$750.00 and the left over things were eagerly taken by the Jerseyville Red Cross as they were broadcasting over the Jerseyville station for clothing. Our things clothed three burned out families and many flooded out families near Gillespie, Illinois. Some things we took to the Jerseyville Salvation Army and some went to the Mission for Children. The proceeds will be used to finish our restoration work at the church. By the way, it's air conditioned now! New lights, too."



The two projectile points here pictured were found on the surface of a field on the Principia College campus in Elsah Township. They were picked up on the same field survey trip by B. Thornton, not a hundred yards from one another. As such, they illustrate the sort of problem amateur archeologists may have in collecting. The larger point is Archaic, of the Thebes type, re-sharpened by the original users, while the smaller point is a Jersey Bluff arrow point, perhaps a thousand years old. Thus the earlier point lay in the ground several thousand years before the small one was made, though because of their closeness on the surface of the same field, the casual collector may be led to assume that they are the same vintage.

